



Waiver Wise

Technical Assistance for the Community Options Program Waiver COP-W

Wisconsin Department of Health & Family Services • Division of Supportive Living
Bureau of Aging & Long Term Care Resources

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Home Modifications: Ramps and Bathrooms

What are Home Modifications?

Home Modifications in CIP II and COP-W are those services which assess the need for, arrange for, and provide modifications and/or improvements to a participant's residence to allow for community living and to ensure the health, safety, security, accessibility, and maximum degree of independent functioning. Such adaptations may include the installation of ramps and grab-bars, widening of doorways, modification of bathroom facilities, or installation of specialized electric and plumbing systems which are necessary to accommodate the medical equipment and supplies necessary for the welfare of the individual. The majority of home modification requests that are reviewed are ramps, stair gliders, platform lifts, and bathroom and kitchen modifications.

COP-Waiver Documentation of Home Modifications

All modifications require prior approval. Documentation should include an explanation of the need for the home modification. In addition, an itemized list must be included in the Individual Service Plan, which is approved by the Department and their designee, The Management Group. Accepted estimates must include a complete breakdown of material and labor costs in order to determine if all or part of the modification is allowable.

The county agency must be able to verify that any applicable provider licensure or certification has been met and all modifications were made in accordance with state and local building codes, keeping in mind that townships and local municipalities can have different codes within the same county. This information may be obtained from a city, town hall, planning department, or the Department of Commerce Safety and Building Commission (608-266-3151 or <http://commerce.state.wi.us>). It is very important to obtain appropriate licensure and code information before beginning any home modification project. The following are some general guidelines regarding licensing of contractors:

- **CONTRACTORS:** In Wisconsin, general contractors are required to have a Dwelling Contractor Financial Responsibility Certification.

- **PLUMBERS:** Anyone doing plumbing work in the state has to be licensed. This is the only trade that has this requirement.
- **ELECTRICIANS:** The state offers a certification program for electricians, which means they offer testing and a certificate. However, it is a voluntary program and the state has no requirements in its building codes to use certified electricians. Some larger municipalities do have these codes, however.
- **CARPENTERS:** No licensing or certification is required.
- **UNIFORM DWELLING CODE:** The state Uniform Dwelling Code does not cover 1-2 family dwellings, unless they were built after 1980. For those 1-2 family dwellings built after 1980, there are a number of specifications regarding accessibility that apply to homes.

Non-Waiver allowable Home Modifications

Excluded are those adaptations or improvements to the home which are of general utility and are not of direct medical or remedial benefit to the individual, such as carpeting, roof repair, or central air conditioning. Additions that add to the total square footage of the home are also excluded, except as necessary for adequate accessibility or as a residual to the home modification. It is likely that a residence's total square footage may increase as a result of a completed home modification that increased the participant's access to a specified area. Examples of these home modifications include: widening a hallway or doorways or converting space from closet to bath or from an entrance to the bedroom or as additional bathroom space.

Key Items to Note for Common Allowable Home Modifications

Ramps

A ramp's design should at a minimum address the following four points: size of the door's threshold, size of the turnaround platform, pitch, and railings. As always, consult the local building codes for detailed specifications. First, pay attention to the height of the door's threshold. Be aware of the height of any doorframe or weather stripping to ensure the individual will not be trying to maneuver over a lip of more than one-half inch, which would be cumbersome and may pose a potential safety hazard.

Second, turnaround platforms are needed at the top, bottom, and sometimes at intermediate locations in a ramp. These platforms allow the individual to maintain balance while performing tasks like opening doors, transferring in and out of a vehicle, and safely changing direction of travel when a ramp makes a turn. The size of the top turnaround platform needs to accommodate the individual, their mobility device, and maybe even a caregiver maneuvering a wheelchair. Platform space is needed for opening the door and possibly changing direction before moving onto the ramp. Platforms are not considered part of the ramp and, therefore, need to be as close to level with the door's threshold as possible.

The size of the turnaround platform can differ depending on factors such as landscaping (i.e. trees that would have to be removed) and the direction the residence door opens. According to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standard, platforms should, at a

minimum, be no less than 5 X 5 feet. Best practice dictates the optimal size for a platform is 8 X 8 feet. This size allows adequate space for the individual to turn and gives room for the door to be closed while the individual is still on the flat platform. Additional platform space for items such as a planter, storage space, lawn chairs, and garbage cans is **not** waiver allowable because it is of general utility and does not relate to the participant's physical health. Additionally, if a ramp is more than 30 feet in length, a level platform for resting should be included midway in the ramp section. The bottom landing of the ramp should not have a lip greater than one-half inch in height for ease in getting on or off the ramp.

Third, the pitch of the ramp's incline is vital to the ramp being a safe means of entering or exiting the home. The amount of rise for a ramp is the length the ramp must be in relationship to the height of the entrance. The ADA recommends a pitch ratio of 1:12. This translates into having a ramp be 12 inches (or 1 foot) long for every inch of height from the door's threshold down to the ground. For example, if there were 15 inches from a door threshold down to the ground level, best practice would dictate that 15 feet of ramp extend from the turnaround platform. It should be noted that Wisconsin's Uniform Dwelling Code has a pitch ratio of 1:8. This is viewed as steep, especially for some one manually propelling themselves up the ramp.

Please note that local building codes may require latticework or skirting on a ramp. This is a waiver allowable cost only when it is required to meet the building code; otherwise it is considered decorative and will not be funded by the waiver program.

Fourth, railings on ramps are needed around the turnaround platform, as well as along the sides of the ramp to prevent the individual from falling or having wheelchair tires slip off the ramp. The height of the railing should account for variables including the individual's height, arm and hand strength, how the railings are used, and local building codes. For example, an individual who walks on the ramp and leans on the railings for support often needs a very different railing height than that used by someone propelling a wheelchair by pulling along the railing. The typical railing height for someone using a wheelchair is 31 to 34 inches.

Bathroom modifications

Bathroom modifications can allow a participant to gain easier and safer access to maintain personal hygiene by widening existing space, allowing for easier access to tubs or showers, or adapting existing equipment. The following items are typical waiver allowable bathroom modifications:

- Standard tub, but only when replacing an existing tub (i.e. one with claw feet), this is not waiver allowable in new construction.
- 100% accessible tubs
- Roll-in shower stall
- Step-in shower stall
- Ramp to access a shower stall that is not flush with the floor

- Grab bars
- Accessible toilets
- Wall hung or pedestal sinks
- Hand-held shower attachments
- Increasing turnaround space by moving existing walls.

Common Home Modification Questions and Answers

Can the waiver program fund the cost of a third-party assessment or evaluation completed for a home modification? What about the possible cost of obtaining a work estimate?

Yes. The costs of these types of assessments or evaluations are waiver allowable under SPC Code 112.56 – Home Modifications. Your local Independent Living Center (ILC) is a great resource for assessments. Contact the Office for Persons with Physical Disabilities at (608) 266-7974 for the ILC nearest you. For example, an independent living center representative completed a home visit to review the participant's housing and physical abilities to assess what types of home modifications might best improve their access in the home. Plans were drawn up and service recommendations made. The cost of this service is billable under SPC Code 112.56 – Home Modification.

Can the waiver program fund the cost of moving a home modification?

Example 1: A participant is moving from her present apartment into another apartment. She will again need the ramp at the new building. Can the waiver cover the cost of moving the ramp and modifying it to her new apartment?

Yes. The cost of moving her home modification and the cost of making any needed modifications to it for use at her new apartment is a waiver allowable service. Bill for this service under SPC Code 112.56 – Home Modification. Re-verify that all applicable building and housing codes have again been met.

Example 2: What if the participant is moving to another apartment and she no longer needs the ramp at the new apartment? Her landlord requests that the property is restored to what it was before the home modification. The landlord's request is reasonable and his/her right to have the property restored is included in the Fair Housing Act.

No. The cost of restoring the participant's residence as requested by the landlord is not considered a Home Modification. The cost of restoring the property could be funded with COP dollars.

Example 3: What if the participant is no longer an open case due to death, a long term institutional stay, or leaving the program?

No. If the participant is no longer an active case no payments can be made with Waiver or COP Program funds. This is why it is extremely important to have a discussion with

a landlord about returning rental property back to the original condition after the participant is no longer in the program.

Can a program participant and/or surviving family member sell a Home Modification that has been purchased with waiver program funds?

Yes. Home Modifications funded by the waiver program for a participant is technically the property of the participant (or surviving family members in the event of death), not the county. Because ownership lies with the participant, they and/or their surviving family members can sell a Home Modification. Repayment to the county is not mandatory.

Can counties ask the participant and/or surviving family members to return a Home Modification that was purchased with waiver program funding when it is no longer needed or used by the participant?

Counties have the option of requesting a participant and/or surviving family member return a Home Modification the waiver program has purchased when he/she no longer needs or uses it. When the item is given to the next program participant to use, the county should consider what liability they have since the Home Modification was previously owned and may not be considered the property of the current participant, since it is merely “on loan” to them.

Because of Estate Recovery (ER), a county may need to review its policy in regard to the return of Home Modifications. With ER, the value of the Home Modification is charged against the participant’s estate and is clearly the property of the participant, whether they continue to use the item or not.

Can home modifications ever be considered medical/remedial expenses?

Yes. Waiver allowable home modifications completed before a person is enrolled in the Waiver Program can be counted as medical/remedial expenses if the participant is making a payment directly to the vendor.

Can the waiver program fund the cost of diverting an eave away from a ramp and its platform?

Yes. The cost of diverting an eave may be waiver allowable. If an eave is redirected so the roof’s water run-off does not hit the platform or ramp where it may turn into ice and pose a safety problem, it may be waiver allowable. The modification directly relates to the participant’s need for a safe exit without ice build-up or pooled water. Best practice would have a ¼” gap between the platform and ramp’s boards to allow snow, rain and dirt to fall through without allowing the wheelchair tires to get caught.

Can the waiver fund the addition of a bathroom into existing floor space?

Yes. It is allowable to convert existing floor space to add a bathroom. The addition of a bathroom in existing floor space must be based on the individual’s need. “Need” includes the installation of adaptive fixtures (accessible sink, adaptive toilet, accessible shower, accessible bathtub, or an adaptive door) or the need for a location more easily

accessible to the participant whose mobility is impaired. The reimbursable amount may include plumbing or electrical work necessary to add the adaptive fixtures.

Can the waiver fund the addition of a bathroom that adds additional floor space to the home?

No. Under the waiver, the addition of a bathroom to a home that creates new floor space is not allowed. The waiver program could fund the purchase and installation costs of the following items: accessible sink, adaptive toilet, accessible shower, accessible bathtub, or an adaptive door.

When a participant is building a new house, what bathroom modifications can the waiver program fund?

In new construction, given that the need for specific bathroom modifications is documented, the waiver program could fund the purchase and installation costs of the following items: accessible sink, adaptive toilet, accessible shower, accessible bathtub, or an adaptive door. The cost of any electrical work and the cost of plumbing the bathroom would be the participant's responsibility, as that work is of general utility and is not related to the participant's physical health situation.

Does the waiver have to pay for expensive bathroom fixtures that are not relative to the participant's health condition?

No. The waiver can pay for the basic bathroom fixtures. For example, if the participant would like a marble sink instead of a standard sink, he/she can secure alternative funding to pay for the upgrade.

Is there a required height for the installation of grab bars?

No. Grab bars should be hung at a height comfortable and usable for the participant.

Can the waiver program fund steps as a Home Modification? What if the steps are deemed adaptive in size? If regular steps have a standard rise of 7" and a tread of 11", would any variance to this standard be considered adaptive?

Adaptive steps are considered modifications specific to a person's physical disability. The waiver program can fund adaptive steps for a person with mobility impairment, whether they utilize a cane, walker, or crutches and they prefer to have adaptive steps built at their entrance versus a ramp. Adaptive steps are those that have a rise less than 7" or have a tread in excess of 11". People using a walking aid, particularly a four-point walker, may need adaptive steps with unusually deep treads (18 to 24 inches) and low risers (4 to 6 inches). The adaptive steps are to physically accommodate the person and the specific walking aid they use when ambulating. Although it may seem unusual to consider stairs as a part of an accessible design, some people may use certain stairway layouts more efficiently than a ramp. People who use prosthetic legs, crutches, braces or a walker may not be able to get the proper leg swing walking on an inclined surface. Adaptive steps may provide that necessary space. In addition, a ramp may take longer to travel than a stairway and may require too much energy for some users.

